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SUBJECT: Resignation of Liberal Justice Minister Almost
Topples Baden-Wuerttemberg Government

REF: Frankfurt 5551

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1. (SBU) SUMMARY: The July 22 resignation of Baden-Wuerttemberg (B-W) Minister of Justice Corinna Werwigk-Hertneck (Free Democrat Party - FDP), amid allegations that she leaked confidential information to former Economics Minister and B-W FDP chairman Walter Doering, triggered a call for new elections by B-W Minister-President (M-P) Erwin Teufel (Christian Democrat Union - CDU). Teufel's subsequent retraction -- reportedly the result of pressure from national CDU chair Angela Merkel -- has led CDU and opposition insiders to question his leadership during the FDP scandal and postulate that Teufel saw the resignation as a chance to solidify his absolute majority through new elections. END SUMMARY.

2. (U) Corinna Werwigk-Hertneck resigned as B-W Justice Minister on July 22 following reports that she leaked confidential information to former B-W FDP chairman and B-W

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Economics Minister Walter Doering on investigations against him related to the Flow-Tex scandal (reftel.) In a personal statement released to the press, Werwigk-Hertneck rejected the charges but noted that she would step down to prevent further damage to the office.

3. (SBU) Although initially calling for new elections in the wake of Werwigk-Hertneck's resignation, M-P Teufel stated on July 23 that he believed that the CDU-FDP coalition was capable of governing until state elections in 2006. Press reports attribute the reversal to pressure from national CDU chair Angela Merkel, who was reportedly asked by national FDP chairman Guido Westerwelle to intervene with Teufel on the FDP's behalf.

4. (SBU) The CDU-FDP governing coalition has resisted calls from opposition Social Democrats and Greens to discuss Teufel's about-face, voting down a July 28 SPD-Greens' motion to discuss new elections. This followed an agreement between the CDU and SPD caucuses the day before to hold talks on the issue. B-W SPD caucus chief Wolfgang Drexler labeled the rejection a violation of parliamentary procedure and threatened to bring the matter before the B-W Constitutional Court.

5. (SBU) COMMENT: Teufel's call for new elections damaged relations with the FDP and was perceived by many within the B-W CDU as an impromptu power-grab to extend his elected mandate as M-P for an additional five years in the face of declining support. Observers (including some within his own party) contend that recent miscalculations have damaged Teufel's reputation as a keen political tactician. Septel will track debate within B-W on whether Teufel should stand again for M-P in the state's 2006 elections. END COMMENT.

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